



**CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE (CDFA)
CALIFORNIA ORGANIC PRODUCTS ADVISORY COMMITTEE (COPAC)**

September 25, 2025 Meeting Minutes

Hybrid Teleconference

420 South Broadway, Escondido, CA 92025

MEMBERS PRESENT

Matthew Grieshop – Chair
Amanda Felder – Vice Chair
Ben Diesl
Lena Brook
Blake Alexander
Wendy Reynolds – California Department of Public Health (CDPH)

REMOTE MEMBERS

PRESENT

Jamie Carr
Joseph Deviney
Mark Squire
Phillip LaRocca

MEMBERS ABSENT

Leslie Myrick
Kenny Likitprakong
Erin Raser
Jeff Chean
Maroka Kawamura
Christopher Little

INTERESTED PARTIES

Krista Marshall – University of California (UC) Organic Agriculture Institute (OAI)
Jessie Beckett-Parr – California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF)
Jennifer Nuñez - CCOF
Joji Muramoto – UC Santa Cruz
Orry Pratt – UC Agriculture and Natural Resources (UCANR)
Joel Felice – Solano County
Thu Dinh – CDPH
Nick Woodrum – CDPH
Lauren Balthazor – Ventura County
Delia J. Cioc – Riverside County
Rudy Valencia – Riverside County
Monica Winters – San Diego County
Mario R. Maldonado – San Diego County
Camthao Ho – San Diego County
Yvette Pellman – Monterey County

CDFA

Danny Lee
Jefferson Scott
Andrea Cano
Scott Renteria
Kristi Garcia
Leslie Fernandez
Mayze Fowler-Riggs
Rosa Baker
Dr. Kevi Mace

ITEM 1: CALL TO ORDER-INTRODUCTIONS/ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order at 10:08 a.m. by Chair Matthew Grieshop. Roll was called by Kristi Garcia, and a quorum was established.

ITEM 2: PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no public comments.

ITEM 3: REVIEW OF MAY 8, 2025 MEETING MINUTES

Chair Grieshop requested a motion to approve the May 8, 2025, meeting minutes as presented.

MOTION: Blake Alexandre moved to approve the May 8, 2025, meeting minutes as presented. Vice Chair Amanda Felder seconded the motion. A vote by roll call was taken. The motion passed unanimously, with no abstentions.

ITEM 4: CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH (CDPH) UPDATES

Thu Dinh presented the CDPH Organic Program's budget and revenue information. As of June 2025, for Fiscal Year (FY) 2024/25, projected expenditures for total salaries and benefits were \$543,206. Total direct costs were \$120,940. Total indirect costs were \$213,708, bringing the total program cost to \$877,854. Total revenue is projected at \$1,200,000.

Nick Woodrum continued the CDPH Organic Program updates. From January through August, 2025, there were 1,738 renewal licenses and 333 new licenses issued for organic processors. Woodrum reviewed the Organic Processed Product Registration Actions taken. As of September 2025: 59 incomplete applications received, 333 new license applications received, 103 deficiency letters sent, 507 expiration notices sent, 2061 renewal licenses generated, 322 new licenses generated, 121 out of business notices, 1,738 renewal applications received, and four applications were withdrawn.

Chair Grieshop requested whether CDPH could provide a running total on their Organic Processed Product Registrations New and Renewal table at future meetings.

ITEM 5: STATE ORGANIC PROGRAM (SOP) UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA (UC) CONTRACT UPDATES

Dr. Joji Muramoto of UC Santa Cruz (UC Agricultural and Natural Resources) provided a comprehensive report on organic nitrogen management, soil health, and sustainable farming practices. Key research projects included nitrogen mineralization studies examining how various crop residues affect nitrogen availability in organic soils. Dr. Muramoto also led extensive outreach efforts, producing bilingual educational materials and videos, and delivering over 50 presentations and 20 organized events across California, including to underserved communities and Latino farmworker groups: reaching more than 2,200 individuals. Dr. Muramoto confirmed that a final written report and executive summary documenting the full scope of his work will be submitted to COPAC.

Orry Pratt was introduced as the new Administrative Director of the UC Organic Agriculture Institute (OAI), bringing a background in international agricultural development and Spanish fluency to support California's diverse farming communities. Pratt outlined current and upcoming initiatives, including field days and educational events in Sonoma, Placer, San Diego, and Siskiyou counties, and the successful Agroecology Field Quarter for undergraduates. OAI is also conducting research on compost quality and accessibility for organic producers, developing a peer-learning Farmer Education Network (FEN), and creating Spanish-language resources for organic strawberry production. The institute is undergoing a strategic planning process and leadership transition, including the hiring of a faculty director who will also serve as a second organic specialist.

The committee expressed strong appreciation for the work completed under the contract and emphasized the importance of promoting these accomplishments.

MOTION: Lena Brook moved to request that the CDFA State Organic Program create an outreach and education page on its website, where the final OAI report and related deliverables will be posted by January, in time for EcoFarm. Mark Squire seconded the motion. A vote by roll call was taken. The motion passed unanimously, with no abstentions.

ITEM 6:SOP UPDATES

i. Vacancies and Terms

Garcia provided the Vacancies and Terms Report. The vacancies included two producer representatives; one processor representative; one technical representative; one consumer representative; six producer representative alternates; two processor representative alternates; one retail representative alternate; one environmental representative alternate; two technical representative alternates; one consumer representative alternate; and one accredited certifier representative alternate.

Chair Grieshop expressed concern about the ongoing difficulty in filling committee vacancies, despite previous recruitment efforts. In response to this issue, a motion was introduced and passed to implement a set of recruitment strategies aimed at recruiting new committee members.

MOTION: Chair Matthew Grieshop moved to implement a set of recruitment strategies aimed at recruiting new committee members, including conducting direct outreach to at least ten County Farm Bureaus to identify potential board members, creating visible promotional materials for use at SOP booths during industry events, engaging in targeted outreach to commodity groups, particularly those with strong organic representation, to help identify qualified candidates for producer and technical seats, and the development of a recruitment flyer, specifically for consumers, to be distributed through farmers markets and other relevant community channels. Vice Chair Amanda Felder seconded the motion. A vote by roll call was taken. The motion passed unanimously, with no abstentions.

ii. Revenue from Registration/New Registrations

Jefferson Scott presented information on organic registration fees collected by month and year. For FY 2024/25, \$1,844,061 in registration fees were collected and 491 new operations registered with the SOP. Of these 350 new operations, 234 were producers, 121 were handlers, and 10 were processors. The total number of registrants for 2024 was 4,193. Of the 4,193 registrants, 3,336 were producers, 1,252 were handlers, and 156 were processors.

It was noted that the total amount of registration fees collected for FY 2024/25 showed a 4.4 percent decrease compared to the previous year. This decline was attributed to a higher number of new handler registrations, which typically incur lower registration fees, and a significant disruption in the online credit card payment system over the summer. As a result, many registrants either delayed payment or opted to pay by check, skewing the reported figures.

Vice Chair, Amanda Felder, made a request to include a clear note in future reports that identifies the amount of revenue carried over due to the payment system outage. The intent is to avoid confusion or repeat questions in future meetings about any unusual fluctuations in revenue.

iii. Fund Condition Update

Danny Lee provided the SOP Fund Condition update for FY 2024/25. The beginning fund balance was \$1,720,798. Total revenue was \$1,893,586, and available cash was \$3,614,384. Total expenditures were \$2,136,902, cash adjustments were \$129,381, with an ending balance of \$1,348,101.

iv. Compliance and Enforcement/Appeals Summary

Leslie Fernandez provided the Compliance and Enforcement/Appeals Summary for FY 2024/25. There were 164 total complaints of which 111 were investigated by the SOP (CDFA or County Agricultural Commissioners' staff); 17 were referred to Accredited Certifying Agents; 32 were referred to CDPH; and five were referred to the National Organic Program.

There were 1,561 total inspections, of which 913 were conducted at farmers' markets; 209 at production sites; 90 at handling facilities; 17 at processing facilities; 322 at retailers; and 10 at locations including but not limited to restaurants and border stations.

A total of 365 samples were collected, of which 349 were surveillance and 16 were investigative. Of the 349 surveillance samples, 15 contained residues above tolerance levels and 14 contained residues below tolerance levels. Of the 16 investigative samples, four samples tested above tolerance levels.

A total of 10 appeals were received, of which four have been closed and eight remain active.

v. Complaint Activity Report

Fernandez provided the Complaint Activity Report. For FY 2024/25, a total of 70 open complaints were active, of which 38 were open for more than 120 days; 15 were open between 90 and 120 days; three were open between 60 and 90 days; five were open between 30 and 60 days; and nine were open for less than 30 days. An additional 94 complaints have been closed.

vi. Complaint Summary Log

Scott Renteria presented the Complaint Summary Log, detailing complaints and investigations that were assigned and closed for FY 2024/25.

vii. Surveillance Sampling Summary Updates

Renteria provided the Surveillance Sampling Summary updates, detailing the results of samples collected by the SOP during routine surveillance and investigative efforts. For FY 2024/25, there were 349 surveillance samples: 69 at farmers' markets; 74 at production sites; and 206 at retail wholesale facilities. Of the 29 surveillance samples with residues detected: eight were at farmers' markets; two were at production sites; and 19 were at retail or wholesale facilities.

Felder requested a comprehensive list of all commodities tested for pesticide residues, including those that tested negative, to better understand the scope of surveillance and how crops are selected for testing. Felder also emphasized the need for a broader and more risk-based approach to sampling and enforcement, especially considering the increased regulatory burden on small organic farmers following the Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE) rule. Felder advocated targeting areas with higher fraud risk rather than applying uniform scrutiny and suggested that the committee and program staff bring forward ideas for refining this approach at the January meeting.

Committee member Lena Brook also requested an overview of the entire SOP enforcement program, that would include surveillance, investigations, GMO testing, and dairy/livestock oversight, to help committee members better understand the full scope of the program. Committee members also requested a list categorizing pesticide residue finding by function, rather than listing specific chemicals, to help identify trends and inform where alternative inputs or education might be needed. Carr also requested a report on the pilot program conducted by the SOP to accept requests to test for glyphosate.

viii. Cost Share Update

Andrea Cano provided an update on the Cost Share Program. Cano reported that the USDA confirmed national funding for the Cost Share Program through the “One Big Beautiful Bill Act,” allocating \$8 million annually through 2031. However, while the United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) has received authorization for the funding, the program infrastructure is not yet in place. As a result, California cannot begin accepting applicants for the 2025 program year, and the state has not been informed of its specific funding allocation or the reimbursement rate.

ITEM 7: TRANSITION TO ORGANIC PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM (TOPP)

Jesse Beckett-Parr, Chief Program Officer at the California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF) Foundation, presented an overview of the USDA Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP). This initiative, part of the broader \$300 million Organic Transition Initiative launched in 2022, is a \$100 million national effort aimed at increasing domestic organic production to meet growing consumer demand. Beckett-Parr emphasized that while the U.S. organic market has grown to \$70 billion, domestic supply has not kept pace, leading to increased reliance on imports. TOPP addresses this gap by supporting farmers transitioning to organic through mentorship, technical assistance, and educational events. The program has already supported nearly 3,900 new operations and over 260,000 acres in 2024 alone, with over 165 partners involved nationwide.

In California, TOPP collaborates with organizations such as UC OAI, California Polytechnical State University (Cal Poly), and others to provide mentorship, field days, and organic-specific training. Notably, Cal Poly is developing the first Certified Crop Advisor (CCA) course focused on organic agriculture. The program also complements the CDFA’s Organic Transition Pilot (OTP) Program by providing additional technical

assistance to small-scale and socially disadvantaged farmers. Beckett-Parr highlighted the successful pairing of CDFA grantees with experienced organic mentors, fostering peer-to-peer learning and tailored support.

However, the program is set to end in 2026 due to changes in federal administration priorities. Beckett-Parr expressed concern about sustaining the program's infrastructure and impact, noting that philanthropic funding alone cannot fill the gap left by the loss of USDA support. Discussions are underway among regional leads to explore sustainable models, including state funding and scaled-down versions of the program. Beckett-Parr emphasized the importance of preserving the collaborative network and resources developed through TOPP, including the national website and newly established extension programs.

ITEM 8: OFFICE OF AGRICULTURAL RESILIENCE AND SUSTAINABILITY (OARS)

Dr. Kevi Mace from CDFA's Office of Agricultural Resilience and Sustainability (OARS) provided an overview of the office's climate-smart agriculture programs, including updates on the OTP Program and Pollinator Habitat Grant Program. OARS has administered over \$695 million in grants since 2014 through programs like Healthy Soils, State Water Efficiency and Enhancement Program (SWEEP), and Alternative Manure Management Program (AMMP), supporting conservation practices, irrigation efficiency, and manure management to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve sustainability.

Dr. Mace highlighted two newer, one-time programs funded during California's budget surplus years. The Pollinator Habitat Grant Program supported 66 miles of hedgerows, 40 acres of wildlife habitat, and 226 acres under pest management systems, with grantees providing technical assistance and Integrated Pest Management (IPM) training. The Organic Transition Pilot Program offers up to \$60,000 per farmer to support land transitioning to organic certification, with funding for equipment, inputs, and soil-building practices. Administered through four block grantees, the program complements USDA's TOPP initiative.

Dr. Mace explained that organic transition efforts were not bundled with Climate Smart Ag programs due to funding constraints and challenges in quantifying carbon reductions. Dr. Mace also emphasized the shift to block grants to improve technical assistance delivery and reduce administrative burden. The presentation concluded with a brief on OARS's research and policy initiatives.

ITEM 9: ENFORCEMENT EDUCATION SUBCOMMITTEE UPDATE

Committee member Mark Squire acknowledged that although the subcommittee met, a presentation had not been prepared due to time constraints. Squire committed to completing a presentation for the next COPAC meeting and will first review it with the subcommittee before presenting it to the full committee.

ITEM 10: NUMBER OF ORGANIC PRODUCERS ON A NATIONAL LEVEL

Lee reported that, according to the USDA Organic Integrity Database, there were 3,872 certified producers between September 1, 2024, and September 15, 2025. This data was requested at the previous COPAC meeting by committee member Joseph Deviney.

ITEM 11: NEXT MEETING/AGENDA ITEMS

The next meeting will be held at the EcoFarm Conference in Asilomar, on January 22, 2026. Agenda items will include an update on the Enforcement Education Subcommittee, and SOP outreach activities.

ITEM 12: ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 1:12 p.m. by Chair Grieshop.

Respectfully submitted by:

Danny Lee, Supervising Special Investigator II
State Organic Program